IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A messaging system comprising ~~at least one~~ a plurality of distributed front-end messaging system~~s~~ and a centralized data store associated with said ~~at least one~~ distributed front-end messaging system~~s~~, the distributed front-end messaging systems being remotely located from one another and from the centralized data store, the centralized data store being adapted for communication with said distributed front-end messaging systems over a network, ~~in which system~~ the centralized data store ~~includes~~ including means for storing data associated with users of the ~~at least one~~ distributed front-end messaging system~~s~~, the ~~at least one~~ distributed front-end messaging system~~s~~ further including a respective ~~at least one cache~~ means for storing ~~at least a~~ respective different portion~~s~~ of the centralized data, the respective different portions being associated with respective subsets of the users of said ~~at least one~~ distributed front-end messaging system~~s~~, such that at least one messaging function can be provided to a given one of the users of a given one of said ~~at least one~~ distributed front-end messaging system~~s~~ in dependence on the portion of the centralized data stored therein ~~said cache means~~.

2. (Currently amended) A messaging system according to claim 1 wherein ~~there is provided a~~ each of the plurality of distributed front-end messaging systems ~~each~~ is associated with a respective plurality of users and each ~~including~~ includes a cache means, wherein the centralized data store is adapted to store data associated with all users of said front-end messaging systems.

3. (Original) A messaging system according to claim 1 wherein there is further provided a centralized front-end messaging system associated with said centralized data store.

4. (Original) A messaging system according to claim 3 wherein the centralized front-end messaging system is associated with a plurality of users, data associated with said users being stored in the centralized data store.

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5. (Currently amended) A messaging system according to claim 3 wherein the centralized frontend front-end messaging system provides at least one messaging function for users of said at least one distributed front-end messaging system.

6. (Currently amended) A messaging system according to claim 5 wherein the centralized front-end messaging system is adapted to identify the distributed front-end messaging system of a user.

7. (Currently amended) A messaging system according to claim 6 wherein the centralized front-end messaging system is adapted to identify the distributed front-end messaging system of a user in dependence on a called number, a calling number, or a unique user identifier.

8. (Currently amended) A messaging system according to claim 5 wherein the centralized front-end messaging system provides access to all stored data associated with said at least one distributed front-end messaging system associated with the user.

9. (Original) A messaging system according to claim 1 wherein the centralized data store stores configuration data and message data associated with all users.

10. (Original) A messaging system according to claim 1 wherein the at least one messaging function includes call answering.

11. (Original) A messaging system according to claim 5 wherein said at least one messaging function is a subscriber access function.

12. (Original) A messaging system according to claim 1 wherein each front-end messaging system is associated with a respective voice mail domain.

13. (Original) A messaging system of claim 1 wherein each front-end messaging system is associated with a telecommunications switch.

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14. (Currently amended) A method of configuring a messaging system, the messaging system comprising a plurality of distributed front-end messaging systems and a centralized data store associated with said distributed front-end messaging systems, the distributed front-end messaging systems being remotely located from one another and from the centralized data store, the centralized data store being adapted for communication with said distributed front-end messaging systems over a network, the method comprising: storing, ~~at a~~ in the centralized ~~location~~ data store, data associated with ~~all~~ users of the distributed front-end messaging systems; storing, ~~at~~ in the ~~at least one~~ distributed ~~location~~ front-end messaging systems, ~~at least part~~ respective different portions of said centralized data associated with respective subsets of the users ~~at~~ of the ~~at least one~~ distributed ~~location~~ front-end messaging systems, and providing at least one messaging function to a given one of the users ~~at~~ of a given one of the ~~at least one~~ distributed front-end messaging systems in dependence on the corresponding portion of the centralized data stored ~~at~~ in the given distributed ~~location~~ front-end messaging system.

15. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 14 wherein the step of storing ~~the~~ respective different portions of said centralized data ~~at~~ in said ~~at least one~~ distributed ~~location~~ front-end messaging systems comprises ~~the step of~~ caching the respective different portions of said centralized data ~~at the centralized location~~ in the distributed front-end messaging systems.

16. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 14 further comprising ~~the step of~~ providing at least one messaging function to users ~~at~~ of the ~~at least one~~ distributed front-end messaging systems in dependence on data stored ~~at~~ in the centralized ~~locations~~ data store.

17. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 16 ~~wherein~~ further comprising ~~the step of~~ the distributed front-end messaging systems accessing the centralized ~~location~~ data store directly.

18. (New) A centralized data store adapted for use in a messaging system comprising a plurality of distributed front-end messaging systems associated with the centralized data store,

the distributed front-end messaging systems being remotely located from one another and from the centralized data store, the centralized data store being adapted for communication with said distributed front-end messaging systems over a network, the centralized data store including means for storing data associated with users of the distributed front-end messaging systems, the distributed front-end messaging systems further including respective means for storing respective different portions of the centralized data, the respective different portions being associated with respective subsets of the users of said distributed front-end messaging systems, such that at least one messaging function can be provided to a given one of the users of a given one of said distributed front-end messaging systems in dependence on the portion of the centralized data stored therein.